BIRMINGHAM BRASS-WORK.

In connection with the projected exposition of manufactures at that place, the *Birmingham Journal* has commenced a series of articles on its importance, wherein the various manufactures of the town are reviewed. We take from one of them the following remarks on the brass-work:—The history and progress of brassfounding in Birmingham has yet to be written, and we trust it will be done in brass on the stalls of the Exposition: in no town in England has the art been followed to greater advantage, as far as regards extensive production; how far successful as regards elegance and purity of design, we will not pretend to say—let the specimens sent for inspection show. At a period when the blind led the blind, much could not be expected; the spirit of active improvement has not broken in upon the dull calm routine of every-day life. Content to copy the common-place models of their predecessors, it is not to be wondered at there was for a very long period a reign of mediocrity, if not something worse. Then came an impression that something must be done; what to do, and how to do it, ended in the adoption of a bastard style of ornament, a wretched compound of shell and scroll. These, multiplied *ad infinitum*, clung like limpets to our bell-pulls, disfigured our curtain-pins, and perpetuated the sum of deformities. An impression got abroad, somehow or other, that the Grecian style was the only legitimate one; then honeysuckle and acanthus leaf, wretched approximations to the beautiful creations of Greek art, spread their unsightly shapes over all things of brass, useful or ornamental. A rage for animalism then took the place of the other two styles; our door-knockers were transformed into fearful-looking lions' heads, which grinned horribly at us; our tables were supported on their paws, while solemn-looking sphinxes reclined, watching over the mysteries of the drawing-room. The inapplicability of these various styles of ornamentation for their different purposes, was only equalled by the inferior mechanism or tame execution of the articles adorned; the substitution of the bell lever for the meagre looking cord, and the curtain band for the pin, was an era; it became necessary that a superior style of ornament should be introduced, and give an impetus to the trade generally. Minute and trifling as many of the details are which make up a cabinet brassfounder's trade, there are none, saving those embracing the precious metals, in which greater taste may be shown, or more mechanical ingenuity applied. He who calls to mind the purchases made by the School of Design from the Parisian Exposition, will remember the richly foliated ornaments which covered not a few of the bronze articles containing each a lesson in themselves. But these days of false economy have wrought foul wrong to the trade whose progress we are attempting to describe: the stamp has been exchanged for the casting box,—as a consequence, tinselly and gaudy ornament has taken the place of the quiet and rich leafage, which looked so substantial and natural when finished. That this is not confined to our own country, is most true. Our market has been deluged with the multitudinous drapery adornments of "Marsaux." Compelled in self-defence to fight against such fearful odds, it is not to be wondered at that we have, to a certain extent, been obliged to follow, or compete—how unsuccessfully will best be shown by the mention of the disadvantages we labour under: first, that in the knowledge of design we are yet much behind. (In France it is not the fault of the workman himself if he is not instructed in this department of his trade.) With us, until of late years, it was impossible to acquire this important branch of education. And secondly, most people are aware that the French mechanic can subsist on a pittance upon which our own countrymen would starve. We, however, are of opinion that the evil already mentioned will soon work its own cure, and that a better and more substantial class of articles must speedily take place of the flimsy productions of the day; such are in truth the butterflies of a craft which the first touch of the winter of a severer taste, and the acknowledgment that all is not really substantial which seems so, will speedily dissipate: we trust our exposition specimens will help to prove this in a satisfactory manner. It may not be improper to remark, that these observations have been made in consequence of the deteriorating influence which the production of brass goods from plates of sheet metal and by pressure, exert upon the progress of legitimate ornament. The process of stamping effectually precludes the possibility of the shelving or undercutting being introduced, which gives relief to the prominent parts, and is the foundation of all effect and true artistic beauty. It must not, however, be supposed that we are retrograding; far from it, there is a sensible improvement; there seems to be a better understanding abroad as to what is right or wrong, and the ornamentation is more applicable to the purposes or use of the object so ornamented: this recognition is an advance, and indicates a step in the right direction.

NOTES IN THE PROVINCES.

The Braintree Union guardians have resolved, by a majority of one, "that a competent architect be employed to examine the union-house, and report to the board what can be done in the way of enlargement, and the expense thereof."——There are now three established churches and eleven dissenting in the parish of West Ham. Of the new church for the district of Stratford Marsh, named Christ Church, two lithographic views, an exterior and interior, have been prepared, for subscribers of one guinea and upwards towards the building fund.——At a public meeting in the Council Chamber, Salisbury, to decide as to the erection of a new workhouse wing, at a cost of 5,000*l*., or alterations of the old, at a cost of 2,200*l*., it was stated by a member of council, who succeeded in postponing the decision for six months, that there was reason to believe the Government designed "to amalgamate seven or eight unions so far as regarded the juveniles, where they could be educated and brought up to industry."——Collumpton Church is to be reseated and repaired, one gallery removed, and another reduced in scale, with other alterations, all under the superintendence of Mr. Ashworth, of Exeter, architect.——The restoration of Christchurch Priory Church is advancing. The rood screen is finished, and works are in progress in the south aisle.——The new church at Leverstock Green, near Hemel Hempstead, will be ready for consecration in a few months.——A Gothic chapel is proposed to be erected in Heaton Norris, Stockport, from a design by Mr. E. Walters, of Manchester, architect, and under the name of Wycliffe Chapel. The cost will be about 2,200*l*., and the dimension 65 feet in length by 40 feet in width.——All the larger rooms of the new Athenæum at Sheffield are nearly completed, and the opening of the new institution has been announced.——The dock works at Grimsby are in rapid progress, and it is reported that H.R.H. Prince Albert intends visiting them on 11th April, to lay the chief stone.——A Yorkshire genius, an innkeeper at Sowerby, according to a Leeds contemporary, has invented a steam machine to blow the bellows of Sowerby Church organ, to ring the church bells, and to keep the sitters 'warm without' while inwardly occupied with those more spiritual comforts, which themselves, too, have already been proposed to be administered wholesale by the electro-telegraphic machinery.——At Uplentham Hall, the Earl of Zetland's seat in Yorkshire, 900 feet of glass pipes have been laid down.——The Darlington Gas Company, with a view to supplying the town with water, have had the Tees water analysed, and find it to be remarkably pure.——Upwards of one-half of the 2,000*l*. to be realized for the commencement of the new Congregational Church at Scarborough has been subscribed.——Captain Washington, of the harbour and railway department of the Admiralty, has been at North Shields investigating the merits of a proposal to erect new quays, wharfs, and landings there.——At the lead mines near Alston, and elsewhere, the miners are paid 10*s*. a-week as 'subsistence money,' and the balance (if any) of the sum for which they may have worked, as 'pay,' at the year's end,—a sum which, it is said, occasionally amounts to 100*l*. for one man. At a late reckoning at Nenthead, the 'pay' exceeded, by 1,000*l*., the amount divided in any year within the last quarter of a century.——The carpenters at Messrs. Ritson and Co.'s yard, at Maryport, are standing out, it is said: 19*s*. a-week have been offered, with a prospect of constant employment for a lengthened period.——Tenders for the Workington Lock-up having been lodged, Messrs. Thomas Bromley and William Brown, builders, both of Workingtoo, have been declared the contractors.——The ancient stone bridge at Inverness has been destroyed by an overflow of water from Lochness. The west side of the town has been much flooded.

RAILWAY JOTTINGS.

One of the new order of light branch-traffic steam-carriages was tried on the Eastern Counties, and worked satisfactorily till it 'broke down' at express speed 'from an overstraining,' as was said, 'of the delicate machinery.'——An American paper mentions a new casualty in railway travelling. One night, the water in the engine of the afternoon train from Lawrence to Salem was frozen in Middleton Woods; and the passengers, about fourteen in number, were obliged to occupy the cars all night.——The gates on the Grimsby line, facing the Midland station, are now opened and shut by machinery.——A float for trains in crossing the Forth, similar, we presume, to that for crossing the Tay, so amusingly described by *Punch*, was lately launched at Glasgow into the Clyde. It is 170 feet in length, 34 feet in width between the paddles, and 10 feet in depth; and from the limited breadth of the river, it was launched broadside, falling safely 2½ feet into the water. An engine of 56-inch cylinder and 3 feet 6 inches stroke, with a chimney, has been shipped at each paddle. The whole float is of iron, ribbed with ½-inch plates on the bottom.—By a mail-train accident on the Caledonian line, near Carlisle, five passengers (all labourers) have been killed. A second-class carriage, of improper gauge, belonging to the North-Western, is blamed.——Another casualty, but happily without loss of life, has occurred on the Edinburgh and Glasgow, by the breaking, it is said, of a driving-wheel tire only eight days in use.——Lord Brougham, in the House of Lords, has been advocating, by implication, the necessity of realizing our Austrian idea of rendering railway authorities responsible to a jury, in cases of neglect in the adoption of the best possible means of preventing accidents. In allusion to some experiments before the Privy Council on the strength of axles, in which the superiority of Hardy's patent axle was alleged to have been satisfactorily exhibited, his lordship said,—Some hundred weight was placed on the axle, and a shock of the most startling magnitude was given to the carriage. That patent axle was bent into a completely circular shape, without a single fracture being visible in it. Indeed, it was as good an axle, in point of solidity, after the accident as before it. Out of fifty other common axles which were submitted to the same shock, only two were able to stand it. He complained that the directors of railways did not substitute these patent axles, which were 30 per cent. cheaper than the common axles, for those axles, until they were either broken up or worn out. He took this opportunity of letting this fact be known to the Directors; *for*, if death should ensue hereafter from the breaking of an axle, he knew well what the verdict of a jury would be.——A railway ring, it is said, has just been carried completely round that whirling circle of magical revolutions, Paris.——The communication by rail is now either complete, or will soon be, *viâ* Calais, right through the heart of Europe, including Paris, Brussels, Cologne, Antwerp, the Rhine, Berlin, Warsaw, Leipsic, Vienna, Switzerland, and Venice. Arrangements are already in progress for a grand continuous tour, or route, through most of the places here named. Paris itself will thus be approximated to London by a time distance of only eleven hours, or a run actually shorter than that to either of its own provincial capitals, Edinburgh or Dublin.

Royal Academy.—Mr. Richard Westmacott has been elected a Royal Academician.

For Infocon PDF Compression and OCR go to our Website